Definitions
of a
Sustainable Community

The Institute for Sustainable Communities defines sustainability in the following two ways:

What brings together the members of any community may be common locality, common aspirations, common interests or problems or initiatives - but at heart, a true community is one in which difficulties, hopes, and challenges are shared. In a community that sustains itself, people face issues and seek solutions together, building on commonalties while accounting for each other's differences. We all wish to breathe clean air and drink clean water; we all wish to have meaningful work and real opportunity; and we wish to give these things to our children whom we love. This is true everywhere.

Sustainable communities are defined as towns and cities that have taken steps to remain healthy over the long term. Sustainable communities have a strong sense of place. They have a vision that is embraced and actively promoted by all of the key sectors of society, including businesses, disadvantaged groups, environmentalists, civic associations, government agencies, and religious organizations. They are places that build on their assets and dare to be innovative. These communities value healthy ecosystems, use resources efficiently, and actively seek to retain and enhance a locally based economy. There is a pervasive volunteer spirit that is rewarded by concrete results. Partnerships between and among government, the business sector, and nonprofit organizations are common. Public debate in these communities is engaging, inclusive, and constructive. Unlike traditional community development approaches, sustainability strategies emphasize: the whole community (instead of just disadvantaged neighborhoods); ecosystem protection; meaningful and broad-based citizen participation; and economic self-reliance.

The following definitions have been used by other organizations:

"Sustainable development can be defined as development that delivers basic environmental, social, and economic services to all residents of a community without threatening the viability of the natural, built, and social systems."

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives

"A sustainable community uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations. It

seeks improved public health and a better quality of life for all its residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation and promoting efficiency, and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy."

Concern, Inc. (1993)

"Sustainable communities are those communities which support the dignity of families and individuals and in which the quality of life is renewed and enhanced within the context of responsible environmental practice through collective decision-making and action. Sustainable communities depend upon the existence of a social infrastructure which provides for the basic needs of shelter, jobs/income, health, education and social support."

Preliminary definition by working group of the President's Council on Sustainable Development

"Sustainable urban development in the context of human settlements . . . means the continuing maintenance, adaptation, renewal, and development of a city's physical structure and systems and its economic base in such a way as to enable it to provide a satisfactory human environment with minimal demands on resources and minimal adverse effects on the natural environment."

Richard Stren, et al. eds. in Sustainable Cities: Urbanization and the Environment in International Perspective. Westview Press, Boulder, CO. 1992.

Other Definitions:

Meeting the needs of current and future generations while maintaining the stability, prosperity and equity of the region's economic, environmental and social systems.

Enhancing the quality of life and balancing the needs of current and future generations while maintaining economic prosperity, environmental vitality, and social equity.

Attaining a balance between economic prosperity, environmental vitality, and social equity that maintains the quality of life for current and future generations.